

## **Park Avenue Historic District**

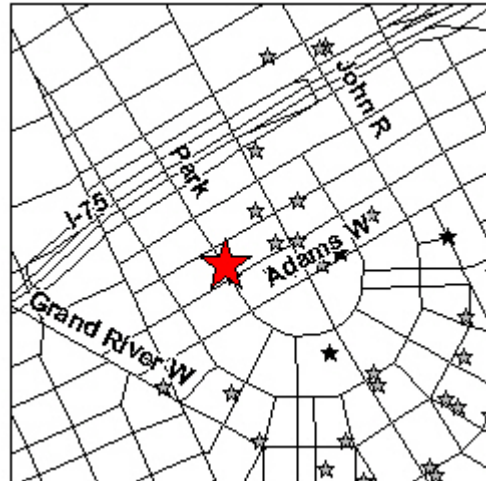
General boundaries: Park Avenue between Elizabeth and the Fisher Freeway.

Local

State

State Marker

National      ✓      5/13/97



**The Detroit Life Building, the Blenheim Apts., and the Women's City Club.**

Photo courtesy of Detroities.com

### **Historic overview:**

The Park Avenue Historic Districts reflects Detroit's boom years of the 1920s and the aspirations of its business people of establishing Detroit's vision of New York's Park or Fifth Avenues. Park Avenue was significant for two reasons beyond its economic boom; one is architecture and design, the other is women's history.

When the 1920s automobile boom hit, Grand Circus Park was already a crowded prestigious address, and development began to spill up Park Avenue. Soon there were apartment buildings, hotels, and office buildings. In 1922, Detroit's world-class architect, Albert Kahn, designed the Park Avenue Building for the site right across from the Kresge Building. This gave Park Avenue two Kahn buildings as its gateway to Grand Circus Park, and a highly distinguished architectural character. Other prominent architects and artisans also contributed to this area. The Women's City Club and the Colony Club had an important connection to a critical social movement of the period, women's suffrage. These buildings provided a center for social and work activities outside of the home.

By World War II, when Detroit's status as the Arsenal of Democracy caused the city's economy to rebound, Park Avenue had a resurgence after the lulls of the depression. It was the street of action in the city, with a colorful mix of social groups. For example, there were elegant restaurants, belly dancing, and a gathering spot for union members. After the 1967 riot, Park Avenue fell into a decline. In the 1970s owners organized a revitalization plan for an entertainment and pedestrian oriented area, but investor interest was transferred to the construction of the Renaissance Center along the waterfront. Today a movement is organizing to retain the streetscape, and promote integrated redevelopment with the construction of the Tiger's new baseball stadium.

